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AMCONSUL DHAHRAN  
AMCONSUL KARACHI  
AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM  
AMEMBASSY LISBON  
AMEMBASSY MADRID  
AMEMBASSY MUSCAT  
AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT  
AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE  
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SUBJECT: BACKGROUND BRIEFING ON TWA HIJACKING  
MONDAY, JUNE 17, 1985,

11. FOLLOWING IS THE TEXT OF BACKGROUND BRIEFING ON TWA  
HIJACKING ON JUNE 17 GIVEN BY ROBERT OAKLEY:

BEGIN TEXT:

SENIOR ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICIAL: I'M GOING TO HAVE TO BE  
VERY, VERY BRIEF BECAUSE WE HAVE IMPORTANT THINGS TO DO,  
AND I'VE GOT SOME OTHER MEETINGS TO GO TO. AND,  
OBVIOUSLY, OUR PRIMARY OBJECTIVE IS TO DO EVERYTHING WE  
CAN TO GET THESE PEOPLE LOOSE, WHICH ALSO WILL HAVE  
SOMETHING TO SAY ABOUT HOW MUCH I CAN RESPOND TO YOUR  
QUESTIONS.

LET ME OPEN BY REPEATING THE STATEMENT WHICH YOU ALL HAVE  
HEARD FREQUENTLY, INCLUDING FROM LARRY SPEAKES THIS  
MORNING:

WE DO NOT MAKE CONCESSIONS TO TERRORISTS. WE DO NOT ASK  
OTHER GOVERNMENTS TO DO SO -- ISRAEL, KUWAIT, WHOEVER

THEY MAY BE. WE ARE CONTINUING OUR INTENSIVE EFFORTS TO SECURE THE RELEASE OF ALL THE PASSENGERS TAKEN HOSTAGE IN LAST FRIDAY'S HIJACKING. WE'RE GRATEFUL TO THE GOVERNMENT OF ALGERIA FOR THEIR EXTENSIVE EFFORTS WHICH HAVE RESULTED IN THE RELEASE OF 87 OF THE HOSTAGES.

DISCUSSIONS WERE HELD YESTERDAY AND RESUMED THIS MORNING BETWEEN THE HIJACKERS AND LEBANESE JUSTICE MINISTER NABIH BERRI, WHO IS ALSO THE HEAD OF THE SHI'A AMAL GROUP. NATIONAL SECURITY ADVISOR BUD MCFARLANE HAS BEEN IN TELEPHONE CONTACT WITH MINISTER BERRI. OUR AMBASSADOR TO BEIRUT, REG BARTHOLOMEW, HAS ALSO BEEN IN FREQUENT TOUCH WITH MINISTER BARRI, AND OTHER RESPONSIBLE OFFICIALS OF THE LEBANESE GOVERNMENT AND VARIOUS ORGANIZATIONS THAT HAVE INFLUENCE.

THE PURPOSE OF THESE CONTACTS IS TO OBTAIN THE IMMEDIATE RELEASE OF ALL THE REMAINING PRISONERS; THOSE WHO WERE TAKEN OFF THE PLANE EARLIER, THOSE WHO APPEAR TO HAVE BEEN TAKEN OFF THE PLANE LAST NIGHT, ALL THE REMAINING PRISONERS WHO HAVEN'T ALREADY BEEN RELEASED WHO WERE ON THAT PLANE WHEN IT WAS HIJACKED.

WE'VE ALSO BEEN IN CONTACT WITH A VARIETY OF OTHER GOVERNMENTS AND PARTIES TO ENLIST THEIR ASSISTANCE IN SECURING THE SAFE RELEASE OF ALL THE HOSTAGES. WE HOPE THIS TRAGIC SITUATION WILL BE RESOLVED AS SOON AS POSSIBLE BY THE RELEASE OF THE HOSTAGES. ITS CONTINUATION DOES NO ONE ANY GOOD. THE INNOCENT VICTIMS OF THIS ACT OF TERRORISM ARE SUFFERING NEEDLESSLY AS ARE THEIR FAMILIES.

THE HIJACKERS ARE NOT GETTING SYMPATHY FOR THEIR DEMANDS. INDEED, IT IS POSSIBLE THAT THE HIJACKING, AND THE WAY IN WHICH THEY HAVE LINKED THE RELEASE OF THE FORMER ANSAR PRISONERS, MAY DELAY THE PREVIOUSLY PLANNED RELEASE OF THESE PRISONERS, AS STATED BY ISRAEL.

WELL, THAT'S MY STATEMENT. I'LL BE HAPPY TO TRY TO ANSWER SOME QUESTIONS.

1Q. HOW MANY HOSTAGES ARE THERE NOW, INCLUDING THE CREW, AND DO YOU KNOW WHERE THEY ARE?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: WE DO NOT KNOW PRECISELY WHERE THEY ARE. I'LL HAVE TO GET YOU THE PRECISE FIGURE ON THE NUMBER OF HOSTAGES.

1Q. YOU'VE MENTIONED ONE THING -- THE PRISONERS THAT WERE TAKEN OFF THE PLANE FRIDAY, AND THOSE, YOU SAID, APPEAR TO HAVE BEEN TAKEN OFF TODAY. DO WE NOT KNOW FOR SURE THAT THEY ARE IN NABIH BERRI'S --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: WE THINK THAT THEY HAVE BEEN TAKEN OFF THE PLANE. WE HAVE NO INDEPENDENT CONFIRMATION, BUT WE BELIEVE THAT IS TRUE. THERE'S BEEN NO ACTIVITY ON BOARD THE PLANE, AND WE THINK THEY'RE OFF. WE CAN'T SAY FOR SURE THAT THEY'RE ALL OFF. I'LL JUST SAY IT'S A QUESTION OF NOT HAVING INDEPENDENT CONFIRMATION. WE BELIEVE THEY'RE OFF.

1Q. WHAT DOES BERRI TELL YOU ABOUT THAT, BECAUSE THEY'RE SUPPOSED TO BE UNDER HIS CONTROL, ARE THEY NOT?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: BARRY SAYS THEY'RE UNDER HIS CONTROL.

1Q. IF THEY ARE, HOW DOES THIS COMPLICATE THINGS?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: EXCUSE ME?

1Q. IF THEY ARE OFF THE PLANE, IF ALL THE PRISONERS OR ALL THE HOSTAGES ARE OFF THE PLANE, FROM OUR POINT OF VIEW, HOW DOES THIS COMPLICATE THINGS OR DOES IT COMPLICATE THINGS?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: THE QUESTION IS NOT SO

MUCH WHERE THEY ARE. THE QUESTION IS, ARE THEY GOING TO BE RELEASED? IF BERRI HAS CLAIMED RESPONSIBILITY FOR THEM, THIS IS FINE. IT'S NICE TO SEE SOMEONE IN A POSITION OF RESPONSIBILITY STEP FORWARD AND ACCEPT IT.

OUR POSITION IS, THAT BEING THE CASE THE PRISONERS -- THE HOSTAGES SHOULD BE RELEASED AS SOON AS POSSIBLE; NOT BEING HELD UP FOR SOME SORT OF NEGOTIATION, CONCESSIONS, TRADE OR HAGGLING.

Q. IS IT YOUR INFORMATION THAT BERRI KNEW ABOUT THIS OPERATION BEFORE IT STARTED, OR WAS HE PART OF THE PLANNING OF IT?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: THOSE OF WHO HAVE BEEN FOLLOWING THIS THING, ESPECIALLY THOSE OF YOU WHO HAVE BEEN OUT TO BEIRUT AT ONE TIME OR OTHER, KNOW JUST HOW DIFFICULT IT IS TO SAY WHO KNEW WHAT, WHEN, I JUST CAN'T

ANSWER THAT QUESTION.

Q. DO YOU BELIEVE THAT THE ONES WHO WERE TAKEN OFF THE PLANE IN ITS SECOND STOP IN BEIRUT AND THOSE WHO APPEAR TO HAVE BEEN TAKEN OFF LAST NIGHT ARE NOW TOGETHER? DO YOU HAVE ANY INDICATION FROM BERRI THAT THEY'VE BEEN REUNITED?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: WE DON'T KNOW EXCEPT BERRI'S STATEMENT, THAT HE IS ASSUMING RESPONSIBILITY FOR ALL OF THEM. WHETHER THEY'RE ALL PHYSICALLY TOGETHER OR NOT, I COULDN'T TELL YOU.

Q. WHAT ABOUT THE ONES THAT WERE THERE PREVIOUSLY, THE NINE OR -

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: THERE'S NO REASON TO BELIEVE THAT THEY HAVE BEEN PUT TOGETHER WITH THE PEOPLE WHO WERE ON THE TWA FLIGHT. SO FAR THE - THERE HAS BEEN NO MENTION OF THE DAWA PRISONERS IN KUWAIT IN CONNECTION WITH THE PEOPLE WHO WERE ON THE TWA FLIGHT.

Q. WHEN THE ISRAELIS TRANSFERRED THOSE DETAINEES, THE LEBANESE SHI'ITES, TO ISRAEL, WE INFORMED THEM THAT THEY WERE IN VIOLATION, I THINK, OF INTERNATIONAL LAW -- I THINK THE FOURTH GENEVA PROTOCOL. WHAT WOULD BE SO WRONG WITH JUST REMINDING THEM AGAIN THAT THEY ARE HOLDING THOSE DETAINEES IN VIOLATION OF INTERNATIONAL LAW?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: OUR POSITION HAS NOT CHANGED. THAT THEY WERE TRANSFERRED FROM ISRAEL TO LEBANON. IT WAS SOMETHING THAT WE OPPOSED AS INCONSISTENT WITH THE FOURTH GENEVA CONVENTION. BUT WE DO NOT BELIEVE THAT THERE IS ANY REASON TO LINK THESE TWO QUESTIONS. INDEED, WE OPPOSE SUCH LINKAGE. AND, AS I'VE SAID, THE PRACTICAL EFFECT IS GOING TO BE, WE THINK, TO DELAY THE RELEASE WHICH THE ISRAELIS HAD PREVIOUSLY PLANNED.

Q. IF WE WON'T ASK THE ISRAELIS TO LET THEM GO, AND THE ISRAELIS WON'T LET THEM GO UNTIL WE ASK THEM TO DO IT, DON'T THE HOSTAGES SUFFER IN THE MEANTIME WHILE WE TRY AND WORK OUT A FACE-SAVING COMPROMISE BETWEEN THESE TWO POSITIONS?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: WELL, OUR POSITION, AS I SAID, IS QUITE CLEAR AND WE'RE NOT CHANGING IT.

Q. TO THE BEST OF YOUR KNOWLEDGE, ARE THE PEOPLE --

Q. HAD WE KNOWN BEFORE THE HIJACKING THAT THE ISRAELIS PLANNED TO RELEASE THESE SHI'ITE PRISONERS?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: THE ISRAELIS HAVE CONSISTENTLY SAID THAT THEY INTENDED TO RELEASE THESE FORMER PRISONERS OF THE ANSAR CAMP OVER TIME, AS THE SECURITY SITUATION IN SOUTHERN LEBANON IMPROVES.

Q. TO THE BEST OF YOUR KNOWLEDGE, ARE ALL THE REMAINING HOSTAGES AMERICAN? AMAL WAS SAYING THERE

WERE FOUR GREEK CITIZENS WITH THEM. DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEA ON THE NATIONALITY BREAKDOWN?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I'LL HAVE TO GET THAT FOR YOU. WE DO HAVE THAT INFORMATION SOMEWHERE AND WE CAN GET IT.

Q. IN THE COURSE OF YOUR CONVERSATIONS WITH BERRI, DOES HE SAY, DOES HE REPEAT THE DEMANDS OF THE HIJACKERS?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: WE'RE NOT NEGOTIATING WITH BERRI. I BELIEVE THAT HE HAS POINTED OUT THE DEMANDS OF THE HIJACKERS, AT LEAST; WHETHER HE HAS ENDORSED THEM OR NOT, I'M NOT QUITE SURE. BUT OUR POSITION ON THAT REMAINS VERY CLEAR.

Q. WELL IF I UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU'RE SAYING THAT IF BERRI HAS CONTROL OF THESE PEOPLE, THEN IT WOULD BE WITHIN HIS POWER TO RELEASE THEM, RIGHT?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: BERRI -

Q. SO IF HE DOES NOT RELEASE THEM, HE IS MAKING DEMANDS UPON THE UNITED STATES, IN ONE WAY OR ANOTHER. COULD YOU CITE WHAT THOSE DEMANDS ARE?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: THE ONLY DEMANDS THAT HAVE BEEN MADE, SO FAR AS I KNOW, ARE FOR THE RELEASE OF THE FORMER ANSAR PRISONERS, AND OUR ANSWER IS VERY CLEAR, "WE DON'T GIVE IN TO TERRORIST DEMANDS." ON THE OTHER HAND, AS HAS BEEN POINTED OUT, THERE WAS A TIMETABLE FOR THEIR RELEASE. UNFORTUNATELY, THESE TWO THINGS HAVE BEEN PUT TOGETHER AND THEY SHOULDN'T BE PUT TOGETHER. THE PRISONERS SHOULD BE RELEASED AT ONCE.

Q. TO CLARIFY THAT, ARE YOU SAYING THAT BERRI SPECIFICALLY HAS ASKED FOR THE RELEASE OF THE 766 HIMSELF?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: THAT I'LL HAVE TO CHECK.

Q. HAVE YOU ASKED BERRI -- SINCE HE ASSUMES RESPONSIBILITY -- HAVE YOU ASKED HIM SPECIFICALLY TO PLEASE GET THE PRISONERS RELEASED?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: THAT WAS THE THRUST OF THE CONVERSATION BETWEEN MCFARLANE AND BERRI.

Q. AND WHAT DID BERRI REPLY TO THAT, SINCE HE SAYS HE HAS RESPONSIBILITY?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I CAN'T GET INTO THE DETAILS OF THE CONVERSATION, BUT THAT INDEED OBVIOUSLY THEY HAVE NOT YET BEEN RELEASED.

Q. IS IT CLEAR TO YOU THROUGH TALKS WITH MR. BERRI THAT HE IS TALKING TO YOU IN HIS CAPACITY AS A LEADER OF AMAL, OR IN HIS CAPACITY AS A MEMBER OF THE LEBANESE GOVERNMENT?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: SO FAR AS I KNOW, HE HASN'T MADE THE DISTINCTION. FORTUNATELY, IN TERMS OF ACCEPTING SOME RESPONSIBILITY, HE HAS BOTH POSITIONS, SO HE IS A REPRESENTATIVE OF THE GOVERNMENT AS WELL AS A REPRESENTATIVE OF THE SHI'A COMMUNITY. AND LET ME REMIND YOU, THE SHI'A A COMMUNITY HAS SUFFERED ENORMOUSLY OVER MANY YEARS OF VIOLENCE AND CONFLICT AND DEPRIVATION.

THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT HAS ALWAYS SUPPORTED POLITICAL RECONCILIATION AND REFORM AMONG THE LEBANESE COMMUNITIES, WHICH WOULD PROVIDE ALL OF THEM WITH EQUITABLE POLITICAL DISTRIBUTION. SO NABIH BERRI, AS A RESPONSIBLE LEADER OF THE SHI'A COMMUNITY, HAS OUR APPRECIATION. NABIH BERRI, AS SOMEONE WHO HAS ACCEPTED RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE WELL-BEING OF THE PRISONERS, HAS

DONE SOMETHING WE CONSIDER TO BE POSITIVE. BUT NOW WE CALL UPON HIM, AS WE HAVE, TO BRING ABOUT THEIR RELEASE.

Q. THE SITUATION, IN LIGHT OF YOUR ANSWERS IN THE LAST FEW QUESTIONS, SEEM TO HAVE CHANGED -- IT'S NO LONGER A HIJACKING; IT IS A SITUATION IN WHICH A LEBANESE GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL IS CLAIMING RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE POSSESSION OR THE CARE-TAKING OF AMERICAN HOSTAGES. HAS THIS CHANGED THE SITUATION IN THE U.S. GOVERNMENT'S VIEW? YOU'RE NOW DEALING WITH ANOTHER GOVERNMENT THAT HAS CONTROL OF AMERICAN HOSTAGES. IS THIS IN ANY WAY SIMILAR TO THE GOVERNMENT-TO-GOVERNMENT SITUATION THAT OCCURRED IN IRAN?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: THIS GETS BACK TO THE PREVIOUS QUESTION, WHICH I COULDN'T ANSWER, IS THE WAY IN WHICH NABIH BERRI IS SPEAKING AS A LEADER OF THE SHI'A COMMUNITY OR AS A MEMBER OF THE LEBANESE GOVERNMENT? AND IT'S A VERY INTERESTING SITUATION. I CAN'T SPEAK TO WHAT DEGREE HE'S SPEAKING AS ONE; TO WHAT DEGREE HE'S SPEAKING AS ANOTHER. BUT YOU ALL UNDERSTAND THE VERY LIMITED CONTROL WHICH THE LEBANESE GOVERNMENT, AS AN INSTITUTION, HAS OVER WEST BEIRUT.

Q. DO YOU KNOW WHETHER BERRI ACTUALLY DOES HAVE CONTROL OVER THE HOSTAGES?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: NO.

Q. IN LIGHT OF THE DEVELOPMENTS OF THE PAST 24 HOURS, WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOURSELF AS "MORE OPTIMISTIC" OR "LESS OPTIMISTIC" ABOUT GETTING THESE HOSTAGES SAFELY RELEASED?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I WOULD DESCRIBE MYSELF AS NEITHER. I HAVEN'T BEEN MORE OR LESS. AND ALL WE CAN DO IS WORK AT IT WITHOUT MAKING ANY VALUE JUDGMENTS UNTIL THEY'RE RELEASED. THEN --

Q. THIS CHANGE MEANS NOTHING IN TERMS OF IT BEING MORE LIKELY THAT THESE PEOPLE WILL BE RELEASED SAFELY?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: ONE CAN DEDUCE A WHOLE HOST OF ARGUMENTS POINTING BOTH WAYS, PLUSES AND MINUSES, IF YOU WILL. YOU MIGHT SAY THAT THEY ARE SAFER AT THE MOMENT. ON THE OTHER HAND, THAT DOES NOT NECESSARILY MEANS THAT THEIR RELEASE IS MORE LIKELY.

Q. WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE IN PRINCIPLE BETWEEN THE ISRAELI RELEASE OF A BUNCH OF CONVICTED TERRORISTS AND GANGSTERS A COUPLE OF WEEKS AGO AND THIS OPERATION?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: THAT'S SOMETHING YOU'LL HAVE TO ASK THE ISRAELIS, NOT ME.

Q. SIR, CAN I GO BACK TO MY QUESTION ABOUT MR. BERRI'S CONTROL FOR A MOMENT?

Q. SIR, COULD YOU TELL ME IF THE UNITED STATES OPPOSES HAVING ISRAEL RELEASE THESE PRISONERS WHILE AMERICAN HOSTAGES ARE STILL BEING HELD?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: OUR POSITION, I THINK, IS VERY CLEAR. WE DO NOT MAKE CONCESSIONS TO TERRORISTS. WE DO NOT ENCOURAGE OTHER GOVERNMENTS TO DO SO. THE ISRAELI GOVERNMENT PREVIOUSLY HAD A PLAN FOR THE RELEASE OF THE TERRORIST -- NOT OF THE TERRORISTS, BUT OF THE PEOPLE FROM THE FORMER ANSAR CAMP.

Q. DOES --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: WHAT IT DOES, WE WILL SEE.

Q. DOES THAT MEAN THAT THE UNITED STATES DOES OPPOSE HAVING ISRAEL RELEASE THESE PRISONERS WHILE THE HOSTAGES ARE --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: NO. I DIDN'T SAY THAT. I JUST REPEATED OUR POSITION.

Q. COULD YOU SAY IF THE UNITED STATES DOES OPPOSE IT, SIR?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: OUR POSITION IS VERY CLEAR. WE DO NOT MAKE CONCESSIONS WITH TERRORISTS. WE DON'T ENCOURAGE OTHER GOVERNMENTS TO DO SO.

Q. BUT IF THE ISRAELIS WERE INDEPENDENTLY TO DECIDE NOW TO RELEASE THOSE HOSTAGES, WOULD YOU OPPOSE THAT?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: IF THEY WERE TO INDEPENDENTLY DECIDE TO DO SO IN ACCORDANCE WITH THEIR PLAN PREVIOUSLY, IT WOULD PRODUCE PERHAPS A DIFFERENT SITUATION, IF IT WERE NOT LINKED TO THE QUESTION OF THE TERRORISTS. BUT WE BELIEVE THAT THE HIJACKERS SHOULD DROP THEIR DEMANDS FOR -- WHICH INCLUDE THE LINKAGE HERE.

Q. HAVE WE TOLD BERRI THAT THE PRACTICAL EFFECT OF THE HOSTAGE SITUATION IS TO DELAY THE RETURN OF THE PRISONERS IN ISRAEL? DID WE ACTUALLY TELL HIM THAT?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: IF YOU LISTENED TO THE (SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL) BACKGROUNDER THIS MORNING, HE TALKS ABOUT THAT. HE SAYS THAT IF THE HOSTAGE SITUATION WERE TO BE CLEARED UP, IT MIGHT BE POSSIBLE FOR THE ISRAELIS TO PROCEED ON THEIR PREVIOUSLY PLANNED RELEASE OF THE LEBANESE PRISONERS.

Q. BUT DID WE TELL BERRI THIS?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: (SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL) WAS TALKING ABOUT MCFARLANE'S CONVERSATION WITH BERRI.

Q. YOU, A FEW MINUTES AGO, TALKED ABOUT THE PLUSES AND MINUSES OF THE NEW SITUATION. DOESN'T THE FACT THAT THEY'RE OFF THE PLANE AND SOME PLACE THAT WE DON'T KNOW WHERE THEY ARE, MEAN THAT THEY COULD BE SUSTAINED FOR A LONGER PERIOD OF TIME, SEPARATED PERHAPS --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: MY COMMENT, I SAID IN SOME WAYS THEY MAY BE SAFER, IN OTHER WAYS IT DOES NOT NECESSARILY MEAN THAT THEIR RELEASE IS MORE IMMINENT. BUT YOU COULD TURN IT THE OTHER WAY AROUND AND SAY THAT NABIH BERRI AS A RESPONSIBLE LEADER OF THE SHI'A COMMUNITY AS WELL AS A MINISTER HAS ACCEPTED RESPONSIBILITY. THEREFORE, IF HE IS WILLING TO EXERCISE THAT RESPONSIBILITY, THIS COULD LEAD TO THEIR EARLY RELEASE RATHER THAN DEALING WITH A BUNCH OF HIJACKERS WHO HAVE NO SUCH PERSON IN A POSITION OF RESPONSIBILITY. THAT'S WHY I SAID YOU GOT PLUSES AND MINUSES.

Q. FROM YOUR PERSPECTIVE AS A COUNTER-TERRORIST OFFICIAL --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I DON'T WANT TO GET IN ANY SORT OF VALUE JUDGMENTS.

Q. WELL, WHAT IS EFFECTIVELY THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN BERRI HOLDING AMERICAN PASSENGERS AS HOSTAGES TO CERTAIN POLITICAL DEMANDS AND THE ORIGINAL HIJACKERS HOLDING THE AMERICAN PASSENGERS HOSTAGE --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: OUR POSITION --

Q. -- TO THE SAME DEMAND?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: MARVIN, OUR POSITION IS EXACTLY THE SAME. WE WANT THEM RELEASED AT ONCE, NO CONDITIONS ASKED.

Q. YOU ARE AT THE SAME TIME REFERRING TO BERRI AS A RESPONSIBLE SHI'ITE LEADER.



SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: YES.

Q. HOW RESPONSIBLE IS HE IF HE IS IN FACT, IN EFFECT, PERFORMING THE SAME FUNCTION AS THE ORIGINAL HIJACKERS?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: MARVIN, THAT'S WHY WE HAVE SAID, IN OUR VIEW RESPONSIBILITY IS NOT MERELY TO KEEP THEM SAFE BUT TO RELEASE THEM AT ONCE.

Q. AS A FOLLOW-UP TO THE "-

Q. THEN DOES THE PRESIDENT'S THREAT TO FREE THE HOSTAGES FOR THE UNSAFETY OF THOSE HOLDING THEM STILL HOLD?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: THAT'S A SUBJECT THAT I REALLY CAN'T COMMENT ON, GIVEN THE SENSITIVITY OF THE SITUATION WE'RE IN.

Q. HAVE YOU MADE CLEAR TO MR. BERRI THAT WE WANT ALL OF THE HOSTAGES RELEASED, AND WHAT DO YOU MEAN, WITHOUT DISTINCTION BETWEEN OFFICIALS, NON-OFFICIALS, MILITARY, NON-MILITARY, JEW, NON-JEW?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: YES.

Q. AND SO THAT INCLUDES THE SIX OR EIGHT THAT WERE TAKEN OFF THE PLANE -

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: INDEED.

Q. - FRIDAY NIGHT. IT DOES NOT -

Q. MR. --

Q. BUT JUST TO UNDERSTAND YOU CORRECTLY, IT DOES NOT NECESSARILY INCLUDE THE SEVEN AMERICANS WHO ARE -- STILL REMAIN HOSTAGE IN SOME OTHER PART OF LEBANON?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: BERRI HAS CLAIMED NO RESPONSIBILITY FOR THEM. WE HAVE BEEN IN TOUCH WITH BERRI, WITH ALL OF THE RESPONSIBLE OR INFLUENTIAL, IF YOU WANT TO PUT IT THAT WAY, LEADERS IN LEBANON ON THE SUBJECT OF THE OTHER HOSTAGES OVER A LONG PERIOD OF TIME. BUT THAT IS SEPARATE FROM THIS, ALTHOUGH HE IS ONE OF THE PEOPLE THAT WE'VE TALKED TO ABOUT THIS ABOUT THE OTHER PROBLEM.

Q. WHAT ROLE SYRIA PLAYS SINCE THEY ARE KNOWN FOR THEIR GOOD RELATIONS WITH NABIH BERRI?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I DON'T WANT TO COMMENT ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SYRIA AND NABIH BERRI --

Q. HAVE YOU BEEN ABLE TO --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: -- EXCEPT THAT WE THINK, REFERRING TO PRESIDENT ASSAD'S STATEMENT, PUBLIC STATEMENT OF LAST WEEK, HE HAS TALKED ABOUT HIS VIEWS ON THE HOSTAGES, ON THE WHOLE IDEA OF HOSTAGE-TAKING AND KIDNAPPING AND TERRORISM, WHERE HE SAYS HE OPPOSES IT.

MR. DJEREJIAN: WE'RE GOING TO TAKE TWO MORE QUESTIONS.

Q. HAVE YOU BEEN ABLE TO PRECISELY DEFINE THE AFFILIATION OF THE HIJACKERS?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: NO.

Q. JUST A MINOR CLARIFICATION: DOES THE UNITED STATES HAVE REASON TO BELIEVE THAT BERRI HAS INFLUENCE OVER THE SIX TO TEN PEOPLE THAT WERE INITIALLY REMOVED OFF THE PLANE?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: BERRI HAS CLAIMED RESPONSIBILITY FOR ALL OF THEM. THEREFORE, WE DO

BELIEVE THAT BERRI HAS INFLUENCE. CONTROL, INFLUENCE.  
THE DEGREE OF CONTROL, THE DEGREE OF INFLUENCE, IS  
SOMETHING THAT'S VERY HARD TO SAY.

1Q. HOW MUCH BERRI HAS INFLUENCE ON THE HIJACKERS?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: EXCUSE ME?

1Q. HOW MUCH BERRI HAS INFLUENCE ON THE HIJACKERS?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: THAT'S WHAT I SAID.  
HOW MUCH IS HARD TO TELL.

END TEXT.

SHULTZ